

VZCZCXR07896
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI
DE RUEHNE #0060/01 0141241
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 141241Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9131
INFO RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 5480
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 4698
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4500
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 7517
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 2619
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 3059

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000060

SIPDIS

CA/FPP FOR JILL NYSTROM, PLEASE PASS TO DHS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KFRD CVIS ASEC IN BT

SUBJECT: BHUTANESE CULTURE GROUP IN SMUGGLING PERFORMANCE

REF: (A) 08 NEW DELHI 3190, (B) 09 NEW DELHI 000007

¶1. SUMMARY: New Delhi's recent confirmation that a P3 group of Bhutanese cultural performers was a front for alien smuggling demonstrates continuing and serious fraud issues with groups from Bhutan initially reported a year ago (reftel A). Six of the twelve associated applicants interviewed individually by the Fraud Prevention Unit confessed to conspiring to work together along with their fixer, a Bhutanese national, to allow them to work and/or immigrate to the illegally. Given our relatively small Bhutanese visa applicant pool (we adjudicated 599 cases in CY09), such a large group gives us greater cause for reflection when interviewing these applicants, especially in light of the findings of our Bhutanese traveler validation study (reftel B). END SUMMARY.

¶2. Post recently interviewed a group of 12 Bhutanese nationals who stated that their purpose of travel was to perform as members of a Buddhist folk music and dance troupe, petitioned by Bhutan Performing Arts Corp., at several US venues. As part of Post's normal P3 adjudication procedure, FPU conducts a pre-appointment review of the information provided by the group's members. In this case, the review exposed several concerns including the fact that the individual arranging the group's travel, Sonam Phuntsho (DOB 14MAR1949, PPT G006991), appeared to still be in the US although ADIS records indicated his departure. As part of the review, we called the contact number in the U.S., and spoke with a man identifying himself as Phuntsho. During this conversation the information he provided about his spouse did not agree with visa application records. COMMENT: Post speculates that Phuntsho provided his and his companion's passports to another traveler for the purpose of establishing an ADIS record. END COMMENT.

¶3. With Post already alerted to the possible mala fide intent of the applicants, the NIV interviewing officer noted that the applicants did not possess any specific knowledge about their trip, such as the performance venues. Moreover, five of the group, including the leader, had no prior travel while the others had substantially identical travel histories. Indian applicants often attempt to enhance their travel history by taking brief visits to Southeast Asian countries, in the hopes of improving their chances at receiving a visa to a Western nation. As a result, the officer referred the cases to the Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) where six of the twelve applicants were given individual follow-up interviews.

¶4. FPU first interviewed the putative group leader Gyembo Dorji (PPT G0118258). He initially stated that he had been associated with Kuenphen Performers Arts Thimpu for the past three years as a coordinator and a mask dancer. However, when asked about his performances with the other group members, he was unable to provide any information about their background or his previous performing experience with them. Despite being the team leader he was not aware of even a basic travel itinerary for the group. After further questioning, and faced with several inconsistencies between the stories of the other group members, he admitted the fraud. He

informed the FPU team that travel arranger Sonam Phuntsho was actually his father, and admitted that none of the members was a performer, but all had relatives in the US, and their intention was to travel to the US to work or settle illegally.

¶ 5. Dorji also informed FPU that his mother, Dema Phuntsho, was currently in their village in Bhutan and the lady, alleged to be Dema Phuntsho (DOB 01JAN1969, PPT G017113), who had travelled with his father to the U.S. and posed as his wife during the visa interview, was unknown to him. In fact, Dorji was unable to identify her picture when shown it in a matrix of other Bhutanese females. While Dorji initially stated that there was no money exchanged between the group members and his father for the visa scheme, two members (Kuezang Lhaden, and Kingley Zangmo) later confirmed that they had been told to pay Phuntsho USD 3,000-4,000 after receiving the visa and arriving in the United States.

¶ 6. The other five group members interviewed by FPU admitted their participation in the scheme after being confronted with the information provided by Dorji, and all prepared written and affirmed statements that they were actually intending to travel to the US to meet family and work illegally. All stated that the entire group had met previously to discuss the interview, that they had been coached by Dorji and the arranger to maintain silence as to their motives as well as the Dorji-Phuntsho family relationship, and all admitted they knew that none of the other members of the group were performers and that all were acting in concert to get to the United States. While all six acknowledged that they knew that Sonam Phuntsho's true wife was in their home village in Bhutan, none were able to identify the lady who had posed as his wife.

¶ 7. COMMENT: Given the nature of the smuggling plan and the concerted action of all members of the group, they were found ineligible under Sections 212(a)(6)(E) and 212 (a)(6)(C)(i) of the INA. There continues to be uncertainty about the true location of Sonam Phuntsho and the woman posing as his wife; as ADIS indicates they have departed from the U.S., Post speculates that perhaps other Bhutanese nationals used their passports. As their visas have now expired, there was no need to ask the Department for prudential revocation. However, provisional 6C1 and 6E entries have been placed against both records. This case illustrates the benefit of the New Delhi's P3 pre-interview review process and highlights the need for continuing careful scrutiny of Bhutanese group travelers.
END COMMENT

ROEMER